

Broken Alabaster Boxes

by E.A. Johnston

To be greatly used by God, we must be prepared to suffer greatly and trust in His purpose and promise to make us perfect through our suffering.

Duration: 24:14

Scripture: Psalm 23:4, Matthew 16:24, John 12:25, Romans 8:17, 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, Philippians 3:10, 2 Timothy 3:12

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares stories of individuals who have experienced suffering and how it has shaped their faith. One example is Dr. Rosevere, a white woman who was captured and brutally beaten during a rebellion in the Congo. Despite her pain, she found solace in the belief that she was sharing in the fellowship of Christ's suffering. The speaker also discusses a conversation with Adrian Rogers, who believed that the turning point in his ministry was the loss of his baby boy. The sermon emphasizes the importance of suffering in the Christian life, drawing from biblical passages that highlight Christ's own suffering and the lessons learned through it.

Transcript

I was sitting with Adrian Rogers in his study one day, and I asked him, I said, Dr. Rogers, when was the turning point in your life where you feel God really put his hand on you and your ministry? He looked at me very seriously and said, I believe it was when Joyce and I lost our baby boy, when he died. I had to sit there in silence and chew on that for a while because his remarks shook me, and there is a verse of scripture which gnaws at me, even to read it is hard, for it cuts like a knife. The verse is found in 1 Peter chapter 4 and verse 1. Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind.

You see, there is a golden key in that verse that unlocks the secret to usefulness in the Christian life, and that golden key is found in the word suffered, for to be useful for Christ means great suffering. I recall Leonard Ravenhill remarking, when we get to the judgment seat, Jesus won't be looking for medals on us, but scars. I wholeheartedly agree.

The saints whom God uses are the ones with scars. Trials have cut them. Tribulations have lashed them.

Crisis after crisis has weighted them down with unbearable burdens, all for the fellowship of his sufferance. A saint with scars is a mature saint, and one who understands the ways of God in dealing with

men. Do you want to go deeper with God? Then be prepared to suffer.

You'll get your scars for sure. If you study Christian history as I have, you will soon learn that the men and women whom God has used were often the greatest sufferers. The pruning knife, the refiner's fire, and the powder's wheel are his tools, which he uses to strip, purge, reduce, and mold us into the image most Christlike, this side of glory.

Study the life of George Whitefield and see how that dear suffered for God and how greatly God used him. Look at David Brainerd and peer into his short life and witness the loneliness and suffering he encountered for God. Is his diary still being read by thousands? If you find someone who has the smile of heaven upon their life and ministry, if you dig deep enough, you will find suffering.

God spoke to Ananias about Saul of Tarsus, for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. Would you like to see Paul's laundry list of suffering for Christ? Listen. In labors, more abundant.

In stripes, above measure. In prisons, more frequent. In deaths, oft.

Of the Jews, five times received I forty stripes, save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods. Once I was stoned.

Thrice I suffered shipwreck. A night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeyings often.

In perils of water. In perils of robbers. In perils by my own countrymen.

In perils by the heathen. In perils in the city. In perils in the wilderness.

In perils in the sea. In perils among false brethren. In weariness and painfulness.

In watchings often. In hunger and thirst. In castings often.

In cold and nakedness. Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. You see, friends, a life of usefulness for Christ will be a life of suffering for Christ.

Do you desire usefulness? Then be prepared to suffer. Usefulness arises from the furnace of affliction. One great example of this is found in the life of Charles Spurgeon.

I have a photo of Spurgeon where the great British preacher is sitting at his desk with a quill pen in one hand and the other resting beneath his bearded chin. Spurgeon's eyes are framed by deep circles of wear and fatigue. The dark circles beneath his eyes are so prominent in this photograph that they look as though they were made by a black magic marker.

Spurgeon's face reveals a great atlas-like weight upon him. Weariness and burden is written all over his tired face. He sits there regally like a tragic king whose kingdom is heavy upon his shoulders.

He is marred by life and Christian service. His painfully sad eyes betray a deep manic depression. He sits there absorbed in his work, yet detached.

Perhaps his mind is off in a more pleasant locale like Menton, France, his beloved winter retreat. He sits there as an object of pity, yet how can this be? He's the great Spurgeon! But he looks like a worn-out old man, yet he's just 56. He carries the weight of the metropolitan tabernacle, the pastor's college, his

orphanage, and his theological battles with his peers.

The burden and care of the ministry mark his once cheery countenance. He is not the jovial Spurgeon here, but one who is acquainted with grief. Yet Spurgeon's face reveals another visage staring out from behind the human form.

The face of Christ peers out beautifully behind Spurgeon's sagging face. The man of sorrows is there with him, comforting him, encouraging him on in the work of the kingdom. For to be Christ-like is not to receive awards or accolades or applause.

Rather, it is to be deeply familiar with the great suffering. To be Christ-like is to know what it means to be misunderstood, an object of ridicule, and a target for enemies. To be like Christ is to experientially know reproach, rejection, and even abandonment of close friends.

Our Lord Jesus hung publicly in naked humility on a bloody tree. He was ridiculed, scorned, spat upon, rejected by his own people, and nailed to an ignoble cross like a common criminal. He bore reproach.

The great weight upon Christ on the cross would have been too unbearable for us, for he bore the sins of the world, and he suffered the turned face of the Father who cannot look upon sin. The photo of Spurgeon reveals just how Christ-like he really was. So when the Apostle Peter writes, Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, that is a very cutting verse of scripture because it cuts to the heart of true Christianity.

How bad do we want to suffer for him? Sadly, we shrink from it. We back away from the pruning knife. Who wants pain? But to those who submit to suffering for him will reap benefits unheard of in this life and in eternity.

Our life of suffering brings glory to the Father. I remember Stephen Offord saying a pastor wanted him to go with him to hear a young preacher who was beginning to make some noise. They went to hear this young man, and on their return trip, the pastor asked Dr. Offord what he thought of the young preacher.

Stephen Offord replied, He shows great promise, but he hasn't suffered enough yet. There is a lot of truth in that remark. I like the story in the Gospel of Mark where Mary comes to anoint Jesus with the costly ointment.

Can't you just picture her as she walks down the street in her familiar neighborhood of Bethany? She turns a corner on her way to the house of Simon the leper. She is carrying something precious as she walks. In her hands is that costly box of ointment.

The Bible tells us the contents of that box in Mark 14.3. Spikenard, very precious. She enters the house with that precious ointment and walks over to Jesus while he is reclined and at his meal. Slowly, she approaches him and then she takes that alabaster box and the text says she broke the box.

In other words, she smashed it so that the contents would pour out upon the master's head. Jesus commands her for her actions by saying to his murmuring disciples, let her alone. Why trouble ye her? She hath wrought a good work on me.

For you have, ye have the poor with you always. And whensoever ye will, ye may do them good. But me, ye have not always.

She hath done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint my body to the barren. Verily, I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for memorial of her.

Notice Jesus says she hath done what she could and that's all he asks of us as his followers. We are to do for him what we can with our lives right now while we are alive and have the time and health to do it. We are told to walk in the light while we have light.

We must be searching for opportunities to pour ourselves out for him and his use. You see friends, God's eyes are continually searching the earth for those rare individuals of whom the world was not worthy. Men like Moses and John the Baptist, Luther and Calvin, Whitfield and Wesley, Finney and Moody.

Men who live in a different atmosphere than other mortals. Men who have annihilated self with the cross and whose lives are broken alabaster boxes from which fragrances arise to the heavens from the broken pieces of selflessness, self-sacrifice and self-crucifixion. God is always on the lookout for such men.

I once heard Alan Redpath say when God wants to do the impossible, he takes an impossible man and smashes him. Well I was an impossible man and God sure has smashed me. He's pruned me and stripped me and smashed me and he almost had to kill me.

I was such a stubborn self-reliant rebellious man but in his mercy he smashed me so he could use me. How about you? Yes it is a painful experience to be placed into his refiner's fire. The heat gets pretty intense at times, at times almost unbearable.

But remember this as the great silversmith holds the silver in the flames to purge out the dross and impurities, he never once takes his eyes off the silver. No matter how deep your trial friend, God is there with you in it. His eyes are upon you working to will and do in you to make you more like his son Jesus.

The book of Hebrews has the following solemn passage in chapter 5 verses 7 through 8.

Who in the days of his flesh when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death and was heard and that he feared though he were a son yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered that verse has teeth by the things which he suffered there is that word again suffered he was a suffering savior a man of sorrows acquainted with grief should we shrink from that if we are privileged to suffer for him what joy that should bring us is that not what the apostles did in the book of acts when they were arrested for their witness of christ acts chapter 5 verses 40 through 41 tell us and to him they agreed and when they called the apostles and beaten them they commanded that they should not speak in the name of jesus

and let them go and they departed from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name when persecution comes to the church in the west we too will have the privilege to suffer shame for his name listen to the following story about helen rosevere the greatly used missionary helen rosevere had been a christian for only a short time when she was privileged to sit under the ministry of dr graham scroggie the great scottish bible teacher he wrote in her bible the verse philippians 3 10 that i may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferance being made conformable unto his death as he finished writing out the verse in the fly leaf of her bible he looked at her and replied that i may know him you have come there

and i pray that you will go on to know the power of his resurrection he paused and then looking her straight in the face he added and one day you may be privileged to know something of the fellowship of his sufferance well that statement proved prophetic for 20 years later dr rosevere was the first white woman to be captured during the rebellion of 1964 in the congo in africa she was beaten with a rubber hose and cruelly kicked losing some of her teeth alone she was at the mercy of her cruel attackers she cried out to god that she could bear no more when suddenly she was reminded that 20 years previous she had told god that she would accept the privilege of fellowship with his suffering her fears were stilled and she knew god was there taking her suffering with her i repeat that to be

greatly used of god we must must be prepared to suffer greatly for him he suffered for us we should be willing to suffer for him does not the book of isaiah speak of what he has done for us listen as many were astonished at thee his visage was so marred more than any man and his form more than the sons of men he is despised and rejected a man a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief and we hid as it were our faces from him he was despised and we esteemed him not surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows yet we did esteem him stricken smitten of god and afflicted but he was wounded for our transgressions he was bruised for our iniquities the chastisement of our peace was upon him and with his stripes we are healed all we like sheep have gone astray we have turned everyone

to his own way and the lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all he was oppressed and he was afflicted yet he opened not his mouth he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb so he openeth not his mouth he was taken from prison and from judgment and who shall declare to his generation for he was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people was he stricken christ suffered for us so the purpose of god could be accomplished in second corinthians 5 19 we see how god was working through the suffering and death of his beloved son listen god was in christ reconciling the world unto himself you see friends when god allows us to go through a trial or a storm he has a larger purpose in view he often brings us to places of

brokenness where we become like the broken alabaster box for to be a broken alabaster box means to have a fragrant life pleasing to the lord we become better prayer warriors through trials for a prayer life that grips the attention of the heavenly throne room is not built beneath calm sunny skies but shaped during dark sorrow filled nights a serious prayer life is hammered out on the anvil of pain and anguish desperation and despair when hope hangs on a tattered thread and all human resources are gone there and only there does the answer to the request come here is where the vital prayer life commences which gains the cupped ear of the almighty as he leans over to listen more intently to the pathetic sobs and anguished heart cries which in desperation reach out for his robe of

righteousness to grab hold and not let go till the answer is attained for to become a person of prayer is to be a shrill holy note which continually rings the ears of angels and rattles the gates of glory listen friends a true prayer life is not born out of comforts and prosperity but through trials and adversity in your leanness you will learn to lean upon him through your rolling on stormy seas you will learn how to effectively storm heaven's portals for deliverance when friends fail disappoint and desert you you will seek and find favor with your faithful friend the great british poet william copper wrote one of his hymns god moves in a mysterious way his glorious wonders to perform he plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the raging storm you fearful saints fresh courage take

the threatening clouds you so much dread are big with mercy and shall break and countless blessings on your head is that not true for the christian god's vantage point is higher than ours he can see the outcome

of his plans to bless us listen to what god says in jeremiah 29 11 for i know the thoughts that i think toward you sayeth the lord thoughts of peace and not of evil to give you an expected end whatever place of suffering god places us in we can be assured that romans 8 28 is being accomplished and we know that all things work together for good to them that love god to them who are the called according to his purpose for to be broken alabaster boxes means that we are in his hands and whatever we go through in regard to suffering for him means that it will pour out a blessing to the

father for god will receive glory through it do you believe that i sure do let me close with a poem that's been a means of comfort to me during difficult times the author of the poem is unknown the poem is entitled the god of comfort listen dear ones to the following words i have been through the valley of weeping the valley of sorrow and pain but the god of all comfort was with me at hand to uphold and sustain as the earth needs the clouds and the sunshine our souls need both sorrow and joy so he places us oft in the furnace the dross from the gold to destroy when he leads through some dark valley of trouble his omnipotent hand we can trace for the trials and sorrows he sends us are part of his lessons of grace off we shrink from the purging and pruning forgetting the husband man knows

that the deeper the cutting and pairing the richer the cluster that grows well he knows that affliction is needed he has a wise purpose in view and in the dark valley he whispers hereafter thou shalt know what i do as we travel through life's shadowed valley fresh springs of his love ever rise and we learn that our sorrow and losses are blessings just sent in disguise so we'll follow wherever he leads us let the path be dreary or bright for we've proved that our god can give comfort our god can give songs in the night amen dear friends may the god of all comfort be with you in your trial may he pour out his grace upon you and may you keep looking at him because jesus will never ever take his eyes off of you and remember the words found in first peter chapter 5 verse 10 but the god of all

grace who hath called us unto his eternal glory by christ jesus after that ye have suffered a while make you perfect establish strengthen settle you to him be glory and dominion forever and ever amen did you get that after you have suffered a while it doesn't say if you suffer but after you suffer suffering and following christ go hand in hand but the wonderful promise from this verse is that we can be assured that after we suffer he will make us perfect through that suffering making us more christ-like than ever before he will establish strengthen settle us there's encouragement here so as we go forth to live each day as a blood-bought born-again follower of christ jesus let us be willing to be a broken alabaster box for him for god will accept the fragrance of our brokenness and

suffering to bring glory to him

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